

Reading Russian Orthodox Birth/Baptismal Records

“How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

December 2022

GOAL

This guide will teach you how to extract information from Russian Orthodox Birth/Baptismal records.

INTRODUCTION

In 1722, Tsar Peter the Great mandated the keeping of birth, marriage, and death records by the Russian Orthodox church. In 1806, a standardized pre-printed form was established, and a later version of the form was introduced in 1838, which lasted until the time of the revolution. The form can be found all throughout the Russian Empire, and although variations may exist, but generally, most Orthodox vital records were kept in a columnar format. In most cases, these records were written in Russian. If you do not know how to read old Russian handwriting, you may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [The Russian Alphabet](#)
- [Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar](#)

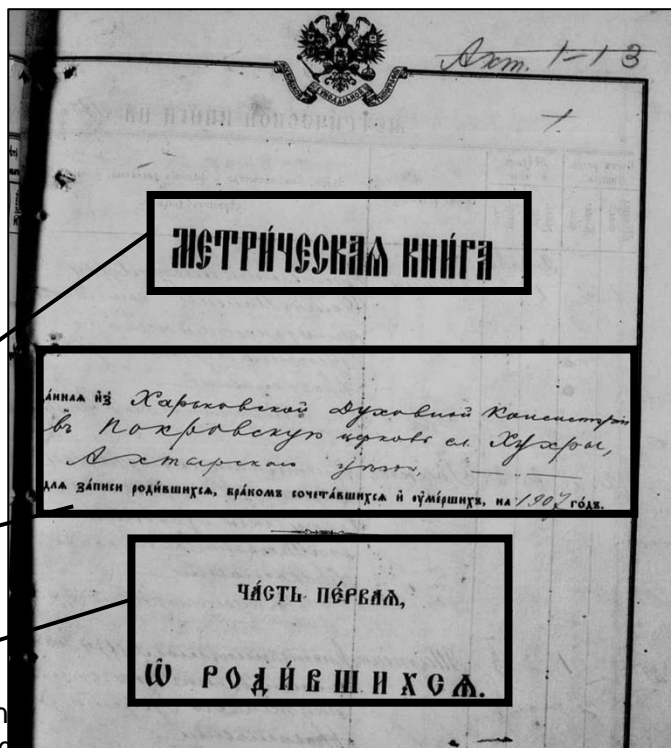
HOW TO

Russian Orthodox church records (also known as metrical books (метрические книги) for a particular parish are typically organized by year, and then in three sections – by record type. Birth/baptismal records are found in the first section, or part one and usually have a cover page at the beginning of the section as seen in the example to the right.

Metrical book

Name of the parish and year.

Part One
Of Births



Russian Orthodox birth/baptismal records span... The information on the left-hand side of the page contains standard information such as

name, date, of birth/baptism, and information about parents, while the left-hand side of the page includes witnesses, the name of the priest who performed the baptism and other comments.

МЕТРИЧЕСКОЙ КНИГЕ НА 1907					ГОДА, ЧАСТЬ ПЕРВАЯ, О РОДИВШИХСЯ.		
Счета родившихся.		Месяц и день		Имена родившихся.	Званіе, имя, Отчество и фамилія родителей, и каковы вѣроисповѣданія.	Кто совершил крѣщеніе.	Рисовальство и подписи по мѣстам.
Мужск. пола.	Женск. пола.	рожд. мѣ.	крещ. мѣ.				
91.	"	Февраль.	28. 29.	Василій	Духовенскій казенный крестьянин Ахсентій Никитинъ сынъ Отыра и законная жена его Евдокія Пантимионовъ дочь, православныя.	Варвара Павловна	
"	67.	28. 29.		Анисія Васильева Демиденкова	Духовенскій казенный крестьянин Отыра Ново-Ивановъ сынъ Отыра и законная жена его Евдокія Пантимионовъ дочь, православныя.	Варвара Павловна	

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CS9J-W9NB-9?i=258&cc=3511744>

See below for a translation of column headings.

1. Entry number		2. Date		3. Name of the child	4. Parents
1a. Male	2a. Female	2a. Birth	2b. Baptism		
Мужск. пола.	Женск. пола.	рожд. мѣ.	крещ. мѣ.	Имена родившихся.	Званіе, имя, Отчество и фамилія родителей, и каковы вѣроисповѣданія.
91.	"	Февраль.	28. 29.	Василій	Духовенскій казенный крестьянин Ахсентій Никитинъ сынъ Отыра и законная жена его Евдокія Пантимионовъ дочь, православныя.

1. ENTRY NUMBER: The entry number is split into two columns: 1a – male, and 2a – female. The number in this column means that child was the xth male or female child born or recorded that year.

2. DATE: The date of the birth was recorded in column 2a, while the date of baptism was recorded in column 2a. In some cases, the month is only written at the top of the page, or even just once at the beginning of the month. You may need to scan the surrounding entries and/or pages to find the birth or baptism month. The examples below show the months in nominative case, which is most common in these records; however, you may find the months with different grammatical case endings, or even in an abbreviated form.

Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)	Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)
January январь	<i>Январь</i>	July июль	<i>Июль</i>
February февраль	<i>Февраль</i>	August августъ	<i>Августъ</i>
March мартъ	<i>Мартъ</i>	September сентябрь	<i>Сентябрь</i>
April апрель	<i>Апрель</i>	October октябрь	<i>Октябрь</i>
May май	<i>Май</i>	November ноябрь	<i>Ноябрь</i>
June июнь	<i>Июнь</i>	December декабрь	<i>Декабрь</i>

3. NAME OF CHILD: The given name of the child was recorded in this column. A child's patronymic and surname are not listed in this column. Instead they can be inferred by father's information in the following column.

4. PARENTS: This column contains information about the parents including social estate, names, and religion. The mother's maiden name was often not recorded. Keep in mind that the paragraph within this column may vary in format, but below is a general representation of a typical column entry.

a

b

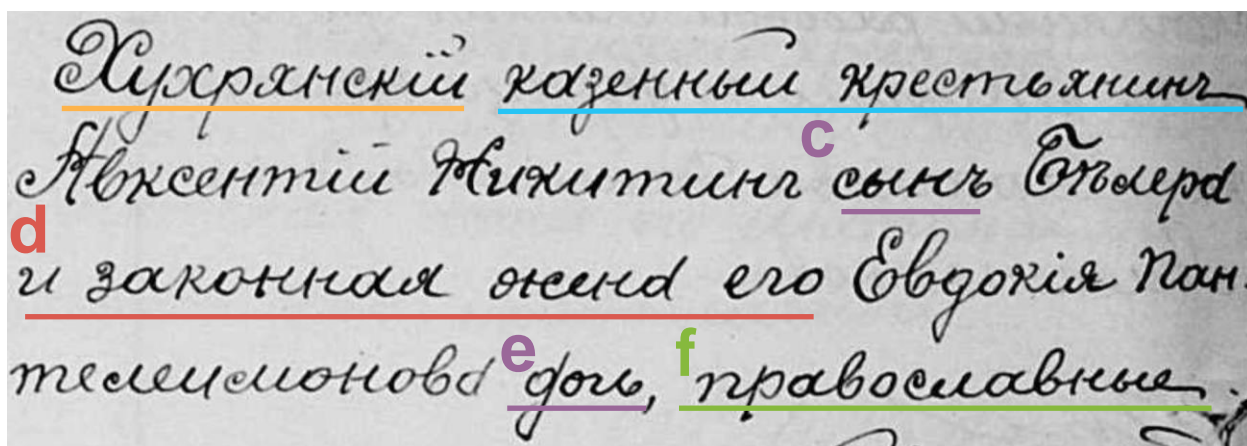


Image from: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CS9J-W9NB-9?i=258&cc=3511744&cat=789509>

Translation and Record Outline:

[Location/place of registration]^a, [social estate]^b, [father's given name] [father's patronymic] son^c [father's surname] and his lawful wife^d [mother's given name] [mother's patronymic] daughter^e, [religion]^f.

a. Location: The paragraph typically begins with the residence (or place of registration) of the family. In some cases, the location may be in adjectival form (with a (ян)ский or (ян)скій ending), as shown in the example below. Remove the adjectival ending and use a good gazetteer to help you determine the correct spelling of the town name.

Хухрянскій → Хухрянскій → Хухра

In other cases, the paragraph may begin with the word for town or village followed by the name of the town or village. Common words that mean village are found below. Keep in mind they are often in genitive case.

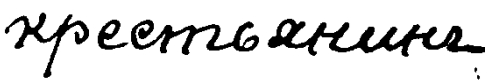

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Farm	Хутор Хутора (genitive case)	Хутора
Village (with a church)	Село Села (genitive case)	Село
Village	Деревня Деревни (genitive case)	Деревни

OTHER HELPFUL VOCABULARY WORDS

English	Russian
village with a church	село

city	город
settlement	посадъ


b. Social Estate: In the Russian Empire, each person had a certain place in society, known as their social estate or *sos/ovie*. They were often recorded in metrical books. Common examples are found below. There are many classifications of the peasant class. See the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for those variations or other social estates that may be listed. An occupation may be listed instead of a social estate. Again, see the Russian Genealogical Word List for help. The father's name will follow the social estate or occupation.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Peasant	Крестьян(ъ)	
Petty bourgeois	Мѣщан(ъ)/ Мѣщанин(ъ)	

c. Son: The word сын(ъ) may follow the father's patronymic, though not in all cases. See below for a handwritten example.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Son	Сын(ъ)	

d. And His Lawful Wife: The father's surname is followed by the phrase и законная жена – and his lawful wife. The wife's name and patronymic will follow the phrase.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
And his lawful wife	И законная его жена	

e. Daughter: The word доч(ъ) may follow the mother's patronymic, though not in all cases. See below for handwritten examples. Pay special attention to the possible variations in the letter “д.”

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Daughter	дочь	
Daughter	дочь	

f. Religion: The religion of the family will follow the wife's name. The most common religion found in these documents is Russian Orthodox. See below for a handwritten example. For other religions, see the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#).

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Russian Orthodox	православные	<i>православные</i>

Right Side Translations


5. Witnesses	6. Who performed the baptism	7. Signatures of the witnesses, optional
ЗНАНИЕ, ИМЯ, ОТЧЕСТВО И ФАМИЛИА ВОСПРИЕМНИКОВЪ.	КТО СОВЕРШАЛЪ ТАННСТВО КРЕЩЕНІА.	РУКОПРИКАДСТВО СВИДѢ- ТЕЛЕЙ ЗАПИСИ ПО ЖЕЛАНИЮ.
<i>Ахтырскій крестьянинъ Іоаннъ Іаковлевъ сынъ Падухъ и жена крестьянина Вассы Феодорова дочь Порошукъ.</i>	<i>Свѣдѣтели</i>	

5. WITNESSES: There were typically two witnesses listed – one male and one female. Witnesses may or may not be related to the family.

*Дитора Ново-Ивановки крестя-
нинъ Василій Іоанновъ сынъ Ремезъ
и жена крестьянина Феодосія Іо-
аннова дочь Демиденкова.*

[Location] [social estate or occupation], [male witness' given name] [male witness' given name], son [male witness' surname] and wife/daughter/widow/bachelorette [female witness' relation's social estate or occupation] [female witness' given name] [female witness' patronymic] daughter [female witness' surname].

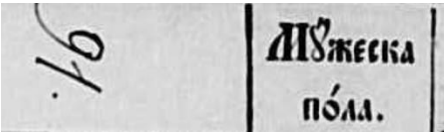
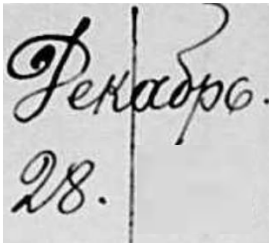
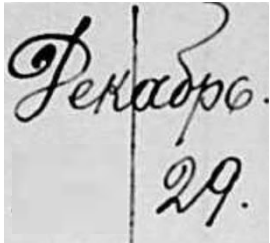

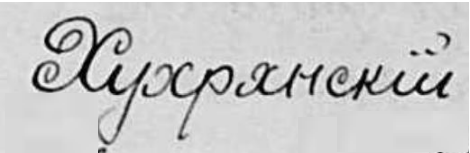
6. WHO PERFORMED THE BAPTISM: This column contains the name of the priest who performed the baptism. The name of the priest is typically the same for all entries on a page, so the name may be written horizontally across all columns.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Priest	Священник(ъ)	

7. SIGNATURES OF THE WITNESSES (OPTIONAL): This column contains the signatures of the witnesses; however, in most cases, this column is left blank.

PRACTICE

Now that we have learned about the key words, let's practice reading the record above by extracting the important genealogical details.

Is the child a male or a female? How do you know?	Male, because the entry number is in the male column.	
What was the date of birth?	28 December 1907	
What was the date of baptism?	29 December 1907	
What is the name of the child?	Vasily (Василий)	
Where is the family from?	Хухра (Khukhra)	

What was the father's social estate?	State Peasant Крестіян(ъ)	 
What was the name of the father?	Auksenty Nikitin Belera (Авксентій Никитинъ Бѣлера)	  
What was the name of the mother?	Evdokiya Pantelemonova (Евдокія Пантелеимонова)	  
Who was the male witness?	The emergency veterinarian Kiril Ignatiev Timoshenko (Запасный ветеринарный Фельдшеръ Кирилль Игнатіевъ сынъ Тимошенко)	
Who was the female witness?	Wife of a soldier, Irina Nikitina Davidenkova	

ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! Click [here](#) to try out the Activity.